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PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Infiltration of personnel from North Vietnam into South Vietnam continues to play a key role in supplying the leadership and technical skills and in replenishing the combat losses of the Viet Cong. Recent evidence, from newly captured prisoners and documents, has increased the total of confirmed infiltrators to a minimum of 21,000 and, more probably, 39,000 since 1959. Reports so far confirm the infiltration of 5,000 to 8,000 personnel in 1964, and, in view of the normal time lag between actual infiltration and confirmation, our earlier estimate of at least 10,000 infiltrators in 1964 still stands.

Furthermore, recent captures continue to support the estimate that up to 75% of those infiltrated in 1964 were ethnic Northerners, indicating that the Hanoi regime fully intends to maintain the high rate of infiltration despite the drying up of the supply of former Southerners who were ordered North by the Viet Minh in 1954. Many of these Northerners are young draftees called into infiltration units that marched south through Laos in units 500-600 strong.

With the changing nature [and the increasing scale] of infiltration [both of arms and of personnel], the course of aggression pursued by the government of North Vietnam has grown progressively more flagrant and unconstrained. The latest step, and one of the gravest significance, is the covert infiltration of a regular combat unit of the North Vietnamese Army into South Vietnam. Evidence accumulating in the last month has now confirmed the presence in northwest Kontum Province since February of the 2d Battalion of the 101st Regiment, 325th Division of the People's Army of Vietnam. It is probable that the other battalions of the 101st Regiment are also in South Vietnam,

and possible that still other elements of the 325th Division have infiltrated. [These well-trained, highly-equipped regular troops are not included in the infiltration totals I have cited and would, of course, increase them.]

Are included in totals on page 1.

Meanwhile, the great bulk of the weapons requirements of the Viet Cong, and nearly all of their heavier, modern, crew-served weapons are supplied from external sources. Net weapons captured from Government of South Vietnam forces -- some 14,000 weapons since 1961 -- have gained the Viet Cong only 10-15% of their over-all weapons requirements, or only 30% of their requirements for their regular, "main force," units alone. The remainder of their weapons, for their 38-46,000 main force troops and for their 100,000 irregulars, must come from outside.

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Moreover, in the flow of infiltrated arms, old US and French weapons captured by the Viet Minh prior to 1954 have given way to modern Communist Bloc weapons, which require resupply of ammunition from outside. It appears that the Viet Cong main force units are being entirely reequipped and retrained with the newest Chinese Communist family of weapons. The 101 weapons captured from elements of a VC regiment in Chuong Thien Province on April 5 and 6 are believed to be representative of the weapons mix of VC main force units. They consisted of 1 US M1 rifle and 4 US carbines, an East German light machine gun, 2 Czech assault rifles and the rest Chinese Communist weapons, including 72 rifles and carbines, 11 assault rifles, 4 light machine guns, 2 60mm mortars, 3 rocket launchers and a 75mm recoilless rifle. Thus over 90% of the small arms and 100% of the larger pieces were of Bloc -- mainly Chinese -- origin. Prisoners captured in this battle stated that their units had been quiet in the past two months because they had

withdrawn to the U Minh Forest to receive and to train with the new family of Chinese Communist weapons.

The one confirmed battalion of North Vietnamese regular troops and any others that may be present are, of course, fully equipped with modern Communist Bloc weapons. The weapons, like the men, were of course infiltrated from North Vietnam, and the ammunition supply has been and will have to be infiltrated from North Vietnam.

Our evidence indicates that the elements of the 325th PAVN Division present in South Vietnam, including the one confirmed battalion in Kontum Province, came south through Laos at the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965, prior to our current air operations against military targets in North Vietnam.

The current South Vietnamese and US air strikes against the North have been carefully designed to impede infiltration of the men and materiel which make the difference between a situation which is manageable and one which is not manageable internally by the Government of South Vietnam. The air strikes have been carefully limited to military targets -- primarily to infiltration targets: transit-point barracks, supply dumps, ammunition depots, lines of communication, radars in the vicinity of these facilities, and more recently railroads, highways and bridges.

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implication
to other strikes*

The recent strikes against bridges have been ^{very} successful. During the period April 3-23, Vietnamese and US aircraft struck a total of 24 rail and highway bridges along key lines of communication in North Vietnam. Primary emphasis has been placed on those routes south of 20° North which have been associated with the movement of men and materiel southward into Laos, and from there, ultimately into South Vietnam. Twenty-three of the

bridges have been destroyed or so badly damaged as to be rendered incapable of supporting traffic ^{for varying periods of time.} An alternate target, an abandoned bridge, sustained minor damage.

The basic objective of these bridge strikes has been to inhibit, reduce and deflect the movement southward of men and materiel by effectively denying use of primary lines of communication and by forcing dependence on an inadequate secondary road system and alternate means of transport. Secondly, such strikes have been designed to increase dependence on an already overburdened truck transport capability by denying use of rail lines in the South. That is, the objectives are to force the infiltration from railroads to trucks and from trucks to feet.

A total of ^{nine} [ten] highway bridges have been struck and destroyed along the key North-South coastal highway Route 1. In addition, two railway and two combination railway-highway bridges situated along Route 1 between Thanh Hoa and Vinh ^{as well as another combination railway-highway bridge a few miles north of Thanh Hoa.} also have been destroyed. These latter strikes have effectively terminated the movement of rail traffic from Thanh Hoa southward to the various convoy-support and staging areas near Routes 8 and 12. Destruction of the railway bridges will result in increased dependence on the highway systems; destruction of the highway bridges will complicate the movement of vehicle convoys southward.

Ten bridges have been struck along the routes leading westward into Laos. Heaviest emphasis has been placed on bridges situated along Routes 8 and 12 which are directly associated with the movement of men and materiel into the Panhandle area of Laos and, ultimately, southward into South Vietnam.

U.S. strikes against bridges in North Vietnam have been extremely accurate and very effective. Spans and piers have been dropped and destroyed,

and bridge approaches and abutments have been severely damaged. Supplementing the bridge strikes, armed reconnaissance is being conducted against truck convoys, maritime traffic, and rolling stock along rail lines. In addition, strikes are being accomplished against secondary target areas associated with the lines of communication.

The carefully controlled air strikes will continue as necessary to impede the infiltration and to persuade the North Vietnamese leadership that their aggression against the South must stop.